

Communities at the Periphery: Perceptions and Representations of the French Banlieues

Interdisciplinary Conference organised by Banlieue Network

French Institute, London, 4-5 April 2013.

Call for Papers

In recent years, the term 'banlieue' has become synonymous with pockets of exclusion on the peripheries of most major French cities. Built in the 1950s and 1960s to address the housing shortage, many banlieues suffer from insufficient social services and high unemployment and delinquency rates. Suburban areas have been the scene of urban violence since the early 1980s but the riots which occurred in 2005, 2007 and 2010, reached an unprecedented scale. In the wake of these outbreaks, media accounts and social commentators highlighted the extent of the social divide in France between residents of disadvantaged urban peripheries and those of more affluent areas. Excluded and marginalised, suburban communities exist at the limits of French society, both literally and metaphorically. In mainstream society, the media-constructed image of the banlieues frequently provides the only insight into life in these underprivileged neighbourhoods. However, the prism of the media often tends to present a distorted image of reality. Focusing on issues of violence, immigration, integration, religion and identity, public discourses have contributed to the consolidation of negative clichés associated with the banlieues.

At a time when disadvantaged communities constitute an unprecedented challenge for urban societies, this conference wishes to tackle the issue of urban segregation in France through a critical analysis of the negative images attached to the banlieues in political and media discourses and different art forms. We propose to explore representations of disadvantaged suburban areas in various public discourses from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective. The conference will take a novel approach to contemporary issues associated with banlieues by linking theoretical research with practical, hands-on approaches in order to provide insights into the mechanisms of social exclusion and spatial segregation. We invite papers which question and problematise the external perceptions and representations of the banlieues in the context of various fields of study including the following:

- French Studies
- Urban Studies
- Postcolonial Studies
- Architecture
- Film Studies
- History
- Literature
- Media Studies
- Urban Geography
- Sociology
- Urban Planning

Guiding topics include, but are not limited to:

- The external perception of the banlieues and their representations in media, and public discourses;
- Interdisciplinary approaches investigating external perceptions of segregated urban areas in France or from a comparative perspective;

- The role of different media (film, photography, newspapers, television) in shaping perceptions of the banlieues;
- The interactions between the built environment and place perception;
- The role of the media in the recent riots;
- The interaction between media images and the representation of the banlieues in various art forms;
- Comparative approaches addressing the international impact of the riots

A second conference, to be organised in 2014, will address self-representation in the banlieues and alternative discourses that challenge the mainstream. These lines of enquiry will therefore not be the focus of the current call.

Banlieue Network

This conference is the first event from a series organised by Banlieue Network, an international research network funded by the AHRC which aims to connect international scholars from a broad range of disciplines with urban practitioners, artists, stakeholders, associations of residents, activists and policy makers and create opportunities for debate, knowledge transfer and sharing expertise and good practice. Although our primary focus is on disadvantaged neighbourhoods in France, we expect the network to extend in the long term to include comparative studies of disadvantaged communities in other European cities. The Network's key objective is to address urban stigmatisation and fight negative clichés by creating a forum for cross-disciplinary debates about future visions of the city and pathways for sustainable communities. Exploring the ways in which communities are represented in narratives, political and media discourses and popular culture and studying the alternative identities residents develop in response to mainstream discourses will help us learn from the shortcomings of previous urban policies and improve the effectiveness of future strategic planning. By involving a broad range of partners and by stimulating comparative approaches, we aim to contribute to new thinking about future ethical, cultural and social landscapes and future directions for society.

Organising Committee:

Juliet Carpenter, Oxford Brookes University
 Christina Horvath, Oxford Brookes University
 Bruno Levasseur, Roehampton University
 Matthew Moran, King's College

Scientific Committee:

Marie-Madeleine Bertucci, Linguistics
 Juliet Carpenter, Urban Geography
 Peter Coles, Photography
 Mustafa Dikec, Human Geography
 Christina Horvath, French Literature
 Michel Kokoreff, Sociology
 Jörg Knieling, Urban Governance
 Bruno Levasseur, French Studies
 Matthew Moran, French Studies

The proposals:

Deadline for proposals: 15st January 2013.

Proposals in English or French (title + 300 words summary) are to be sent to:

christina.horvath@brookes.ac.uk

The organising committee will examine all the proposals and inform the participants of its decisions before 15th February 2013

The working languages of the conference are French and English. Translation services will not be provided.

Funding is available to cover travel and accommodation costs for two young researchers (within 3 years of completing their PhD) to present at the conference. Please indicate in your proposal whether you wish to be considered for funding.

The conference is supported by the Research Network programme of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).